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ART. XIX.—*Life and Letters, together with poetical and miscellaneous pieces of the late William Person, a student of Harvard University.* Cambridge : Hilliard & Metcalf. 1820. pp. 252, 12mo.

WE took up this volume without much expectation of pleasure or instruction. The life of a young man, cut off in the midst of his pupillage, seemed to promise little else than tales of the school and play-ground. Indications of early genius there might be, and examples of docility and diligence fit for other youth to imitate. But that there should be any thing in which the generality of adult readers would take much interest, or any thing of consequence enough to justify the publication, we could hardly suppose. The lives of merely literary men have sometimes been thought to be too barren and monotonous. What then should be said of the life of one, who had not finished his preparatory course, nor even advanced far enough to make choice of a profession? Nor did we build much greater hopes upon the poetical and miscellaneous pieces, said to be contained in the volume. Considered as the compositions of a learner, they might be entitled to great praise; they might be such as would be read with surprize and delight at a school examination; they might even be much more than this, and discover a mind always far in advance of the stage which it had reached in education. But, after all, was it to be expected that they could be any thing more than exercises, designed to strengthen and prepare the faculties for future and more serious exertions?

These were our thoughts, and, as we were not promised a story of a prodigy, of an admirable Crichton, or a Barre-tier, it may well be supposed that we did not begin to read with any great hope that our time was to be well employed. It has proved otherwise, however; and if it be useful and profitable, as it certainly is, to old as well as young, to contemplate virtuous resolution struggling with difficulties, pursuing the noblest objects with a courage which an unshaken trust in Providence only could sustain, and at last arriving at the end which at first seemed unattainable; if manly strength of character, united with the finest sensibility, may deserve and reward attention, we may safely recommend this book to all who take delight in seeing the affections and the moral

qualities called into action, and can love and admire excellence under whatever circumstances, and at whatever age it may appear.

There is something of a romantic and mysterious interest blended with the history of this extraordinary youth ; in consequence of his having been one of those who, by the fault of their parents, come lawlessly into life. It too often happens that the innocent offspring, in such a case, is made to bear the evil and disgrace, while the guilty parties remain concealed, and as the writer of this memoir well remarks, ‘to avoid disgrace and degradation, do what renders them worthy of a punishment still more severe.’ Person, it seems, was deserted by both his parents, and never acknowledged by either. He was born in December, 1793—and in the October following was placed in a respectable family in Andover. Four or five years afterwards he was put to school under a private teacher in that place, with whom he made rapid progress in the studies proper to that age. He was anxious, as it was natural he should be, to know the names and abode of his parents ; but his inquiries were evaded, and he was left in that state of suspense, the painfulness of which, to a susceptible mind, may well be imagined. To be an orphan is misery enough. But to be ignorant of the authors of our being, to be uncertain whether they are among the dead or the living, near us and often seen and conversed with, or far off and studiously shunning our sight, to feel alive and unconnected amidst the mighty throng of men ; and to have no object whereon filial tenderness may expend itself ; this must indeed bring keen anguish to the soul of him, who is thus painfully distinguished. Person, while yet a pupil at Phillips Academy, in one of those melancholy hours, of which we may well suppose there were many in a life like his, thus describes his grief, in reply to the supposed inquiry of a compassionate stranger :

‘ Stranger, why that face of grief ?
Why those tears, that ask relief ?
Is thy heart by anguish torn ?
Art thou left alone to mourn ?—
Kind inquirer, I would tell thee
All the woes, which have befel me ;
But the tale would tend to weary ;

Thou hast told it in thy query.
Thus briefly let my griefs be known—
In the world I'm left alone ;
No kind father to protect me,
No fond mother to direct me,
Sister, brother, all denied me ;
Can aught of deeper woe betide me?—' p. 12.

In the following anecdote we have another proof that the want of the parental relation was ever painfully present to his mind, or that at least the slightest circumstance could bring it to his recollection.

‘ Soon after his removal to Providence, at which time it will be recollected he was about eight years old, he walked by the side of a gentleman into a neighbouring church-yard. While they were looking at the grave-stones and epitaphs, he said to his companion, “ If I were to die, who would there be to erect a monument to my memory—and if they did, what would they put upon it ? ” He paused for a moment, and added, “ William Person, the son of—nobody.” ’ p. 44.

But let it not be supposed that he was so ungrateful as to cherish these dark and gloomy feelings. His prevailing disposition was cheerfulness. His virtues gained him many friends, whose kindness seems to have touched his very soul. On every occasion, when his path was thus brightened by a gleam of sunshine, his heart burst forth in thankfulness, first to that God, of whose constant providence he had a strong and animating conviction, and then to the friends whose benevolence made them the instruments of God's mercy. We cannot forbear here, though somewhat in anticipation of the narrative, to introduce an affecting incident in his college life, alike honourable to his class-mates and to himself. He had returned to Cambridge, after being employed during the winter vacation as a schoolmaster, in a state of such embarrassment as to make it necessary that he should leave college, and ‘ abandon the pursuits and hopes, which he had followed thus far with the most flattering success.’ His feelings at this trying moment, and the unexpected relief afforded by the generosity of his fellow-students, may best be described in his own words. We quote from a letter to a friend in Providence.

‘ All my flattering prospects vanished in an instant ; I saw myself sinking under the wretchedness of poverty and disappointed emulation.’..... ‘ Still I did not murmur, nor cast one reflection against the hand that oppressed me. Divine Providence saw fit that thus it should be, and I submitted, conscious that the Judge of all the earth would do right ; and though I saw no other way but to abandon the course I had hitherto so successfully pursued, yet I did not distrust his grace. I expressed my feelings to no one, but my countenance sufficiently indicated my unhappiness.

‘ One evening after supper I came into my room as usual, and found several of my class-mates assembled there with my chum. I sat down with them, and we all joined conversation. After some time spent in social freedom, they all retired together, and left me alone. This, as you will see directly, was done designedly. I drew up the table, on which our books were laid, near to the fire, and leaning my head upon my hand, sat ruminating on my unhappy situation, till the college clock summoned me to study. My next lesson was in Livy. I found my book laid, as if inadvertently, under some larger ones. Upon opening to the spot where my lesson began, I discovered a letter, sealed and directed to me. At first sight I thought it might contain some difficult question in algebra, some ænigma, or poetical pun, which are frequently left about to try our ingenuity in answering them : but judge my feelings when, on opening it, I found it contained a one hundred dollar bill on the State Bank, Boston, and these lines :—

“ Mr. W. Person,—Dear Sir,

“ Permit a number of your friends to present you the enclosed, as a small proof that brilliancy of talent, (which alone sometimes generates envy,) when united to amiability of disposition, invariably gains esteem.”

‘ It is impossible to describe the successive emotions of surprise, gratitude, and joy, which this splendid and unexpected favour occasioned : It chased away my despondence and restored my usual vivacity, and in the fulness of my heart, I poured out the purest effusions of gratitude to that Almighty power, whose providence has always been my safeguard and support, and who brought me into those trying circumstances that he might make a more illustrious display of his goodness and beneficence toward me. How true it is that “ the Lord will not forsake those who put their trust in him !” Here is an ample supply for all my present necessities, and as for the future, they are yet unknown.

‘ Upon inquiry, I learned that a number of my wealthy classmates, having become acquainted with my circumstances, my re-

cent disappointment, and my necessity of leaving college in consequence, kindly contributed from their abundance to furnish me with the means of continuing here. A young man by the name of R***, from Charleston, S. C., whose superiority of talent justly gives him the first rank in our class, was the principal agent in procuring this donation, and by his means it was conveyed to me in the manner before described. To him therefore as the representative for himself and fellow-donors, I immediately addressed a billet, containing the "simple expression of my gratitude, as a sincere though inadequate return for their distinguished liberality; rendered still more acceptable by the disinterestedness and delicate regard to personal feeling displayed in its application," together with such encomiums and remarks as justice required and my feelings at that time dictated. This was answered in terms the most friendly and flattering. I have been thus explicit, that you might have some idea of my present circumstances as they are, and that you might rejoice with me in my prosperity.' pp. 33—37.

We are now to state very succinctly by what course of events Person became a member of Harvard University. In 1801, he was taken from Andover by two gentlemen, one of whom he did not see after reaching Boston, and the other he accompanied to Providence, and became a resident in his family, as an apprentice for learning the tanner's trade. When he left Andover, he was told, that he should return in a fortnight. This piece of deception was probably thought necessary, on account of his strong attachment to the family in which he resided; an attachment, which seems hardly to have lessened in the long interval which elapsed before his return. In a record made after that event, he describes this journey in a manner, which shews how deeply every circumstance had been imprinted on his mind. The piece is too long to quote, but in the conclusion he thus speaks of his past occupations, and the prospects, which were then opening upon him.

'At six o'clock P. M. I arrived at Providence. To this succeeded a tedious, long, and unremitted apprenticeship; and the promised fortnight was protracted to thirteen years! But I dwelt in the bosom of a worthy family, and am cheered by the consciousness of having served my master faithfully; and am blessed with the satisfaction of knowing, that I am beloved by his family; and possessed with a strong hope of yet enjoying the ac-

complishment of my wishes ; of being agreeable to myself, and useful to my country ; and to crown all, I am restored to Andover !' p. 9.

We are told, that during his residence at Providence, ' his fidelity and diligence in business were most exemplary ; that his moral character was untainted ; his manners and conversation singularly amiable and attractive.' He seems, indeed, to have there found a home, and to have been cordially adopted into a family circle, where a kindness almost parental made him forget awhile his loneliness. In his letters from Andover and Cambridge, he always speaks in terms of the warmest affection and gratitude of his friends at Blooms-grove, the name given to his residence at Providence.

' Blooms-grove, Providence, names which never occur to me, without calling up the most agreeable sensations—scenes of childhood and of youth, where I have passed so many happy hours, where I have lived so long and loved so sincerely—abodes too of those friends, to whom, if to any, I look for continued affection—for continued parental fondness and solicitude, and with whom I yet hope often to mingle in the social circle—places and friends endeared to me by such ties, can I ever forget ?' p. 127.

And again, March 17, 1817.

' Every thing that concerns or comes from Blooms-grove cannot fail to excite my tenderest interest. Never does my heart glow with such warm affection, and tender sensibility as when moved by reflecting on this beloved and to me endeared spot. 'Tis then all the sympathies of my soul expand, and in one fond embrace, encircle all its dear inhabitants, its friends, its cares, its pleasures and its sorrows. And such reflection is always produced by the perusal of your letters ; and while tracing in these the successive demonstrations of your affection and solicitude, I feel the nearest approximation to the pleasures of consanguinity, and almost forget that I am an orphan.' pp. 31, 32.

His ardour for study never abated. His evenings, during his apprenticeship, ' were as faithfully devoted to his own improvement, as his hours of daylight were to the duties of his employment.' An inclination so strong and decided was not to be overcome. By agreement, he was released from his apprenticeship one year sooner than usual. He then returned to Andover. The whole of this transaction is well

described by himself, but we can only allow ourselves to transcribe what relates to his feelings on revisiting the scenes of his earliest childhood.

‘I had an additional motive in visiting this place. [Andover.] It was here I first learned that I was mortal. It was here I passed my infantile years. Here were spent my happiest hours of childish gaiety. Those blissful seasons were engrossed by salutary study and playful diversions with my fellow school-mates. Unconscious of the future, I rambled, laughed, and sung, nor knew of evil. Ever grateful will be the recollection of these youthful scenes—ever dear to me this favoured villa, and dearer still its worthy inhabitants. Indescribable were my feelings, at again beholding them. My sensations were not unlike those of an exile restored to his native country after long and many years of sorrow and despondency! Thirteen years had done but little to obliterate the incidents of childhood or their connexions; and the former involuntarily revived in my memory to assist in identifying the latter. With inexpressible pleasure did I recognize the humble mansion where, for the first seven years of my life, I found a home. Its venerable inmates, with the exception of one, were still living. By them I was cordially received and made paternally welcome.’ p. 20.

He remained at Andover, enjoying the benefit of the liberal provision made in Phillips Academy for the support of charity scholars, till he was prepared for Harvard University, where he was admitted in August, 1816. He soon acquired great reputation as a scholar, and applied himself to study with a diligence too great for his constitution. At the close of his freshman year (July 27, 1817,) he thus writes to his friends at Providence.

‘One year of my college life has almost passed, and yet I hardly feel wonted to the spot. I can scarcely realize that I am a Cambridge student. How swift is the flight of time! Indeed at every successive period of my reflection upon it, the most striking peculiarity I note of it is its greater apparent rapidity. Infancy and childhood have flitted away like meteors of the night, and the golden hours of youth, which constitute the most important and interesting scene of life, are swiftly passing to their exit! Old age will soon succeed, and then life’s little drama close forever! The period of our existence is well compared to “a span,” “the dream of a night,” “a shadow,” “a vapour which appeareth for a moment, and then vanisheth away.”

Twenty-three years of the little space allotted me, are already numbered and finished. The last three or four of these, the interval between this and the time I lived with you, have been so rapid in their transit, that it seems scarcely possible they could form such a portion of my life. The scenes and circumstances of my apprenticeship are as fresh in my memory, as if they occurred but yesterday, and the forms and features of my friends and associates at that period, I trace with almost visible exactness. Circumstances, which have intervened, though of later date, are still less prominent in my recollection. With seeming surprise, therefore, I ask myself the question, "Am I, who was so recently an illiterate mechanic, already the subject of three years' continued study? Have I advanced so far as to be a Cambridge student?" Surely not the time, but the change of place and employment only give reality to the fact.' pp. 133, 134.

The spring vacation of 1818 he employed in studying chemistry. The beginning of the term found him in a very low state of health, and he reluctantly obtained leave of absence. He went to Andover, in the hope, that a short residence there would restore him. 'But,' says his biographer, 'it was now too late; and no medicine, nor change of place could restore a frame, worn out by intense study, and hastened in its decay by the agonies of an aspiring mind struggling under the pressure of poverty.' Sick and feeble as he was, however, he now resolved to make one last effort for satisfying the impatient desire, which he had ever felt, to know his parents, and the story of his birth. His maintenance, until the time of his apprenticeship, had been paid for by a gentleman residing at a distance of about sixty miles, who professed himself to be acting as the friend of his father. Repeated but unsuccessful applications had been made to this gentleman by Person, and by his friends at his request, for the information, which he so anxiously desired. He now resolved to urge his request in person, and for this purpose he undertook and accomplished a journey into New Hampshire. The interview was granted, and upon his pressing his inquiries in the most determined manner, declaring that he would not go till he was satisfied, he was told the name of his mother, 'which he is not known,' says his biographer, 'to have disclosed,' and some particulars of her person and history. She had then been dead about two years. He received no answer to his questions respecting his father. He

was kindly and hospitably entertained by the gentleman, to whom he applied, and not only liberally assisted for the present, but dismissed with a promise of a future provision for his clothing and maintenance while at college. This promise was punctually performed, but the relief came too late. Person survived this visit but a few weeks. On his return to Cambridge, he was unable to perform his college duties, and continued daily to decline, though tenderly watched and nursed in the house of a friend, till the 11th of October 1818, when he expired. ‘His death was as gentle as his life. No wild and tumultuous passions disturbed the holy calm of either.’

It is some solace to our grief for those, whose lives have been long and eminently useful, that the good they have done lives after them. There are numberless memorials of the genius and worth of truly excellent men, which remind us continually that they have been; and while any of these remain, they can hardly be said to have died. The form of their existence only seems to be changed. It was the mind that we valued and that is still seen reforming, instructing, delighting mankind. But when the lot of death falls upon a young man, who has given proof of generous ambition supported by uncommon powers, we feel that we have sustained a loss of unknown extent. There is full room for the imagination to weary itself in tracing that future, which now can never be. What we before anticipated we lament, as if we had actually possessed it. We think little of the accidents, which might have occasioned a more painful disappointment than even death. If we had before any doubts, they vanish now; and we think ourselves certainly deprived of what we had only a distant and uncertain prospect of enjoying. But this disposition is proportioned to the nearness of our interest and the degree in which it is peculiar. The mother, mourning for a beloved child, can never be persuaded that he would not have possessed every virtue, which a parent’s heart could wish. The soldier, disappointed of a battle, never doubts, that he should have returned from the field covered with glory. The merchant, whose ship is driven back by tempests, counts up his gains, and deplores his hard fortune in the loss of them no less than if they had already made a part of his store. When, on the other hand, it is the *promised* scholar, divine or statesman, whose expected public services death

forbids us longer to look for, there is little liveliness of regret in any, but those who feel the warmth of personal affection. Others, however well assured of the reasonableness of the hopes, which had been formed, consider themselves as only remotely concerned in the event. Had he been long the object of their trust and confidence, had they been accustomed to rely on him in times of danger, had they experienced the benefit of his instructions or his benevolent labours, gratitude would claim a tear, and they would follow him to the grave with a heavy heart. The aged patriot or philanthropist may have done all that in reason he could be expected to do. Every talent, he possessed, may have produced some useful and lasting effect. We may be deprived of nothing but the sight of a form, venerable by age, and worn out with exertion. Still, there is a feeling, superior to interest and calculation, which fills us with melancholy, and a oppressive grief when such an one is gathered to an honourable tomb. The world is not so ungrateful as many would represent it. Envy and jealousy may oppress and obscure while living, but the fault is sure to be redeemed, in a succeeding generation, by an ample measure of honour and fame.

A public sorrow for the dead must be earned by being really useful. The promise of being so may cause some regret in those, who are thoroughly persuaded that the promise would have been performed. But it is a cold and interested sorrow, very different from that, which spontaneously bursts forth when the grave closes over one, whose life has been a common blessing. Those, however, who have diligently employed even a few years in laying a foundation for future usefulness, have not lived in vain. A faithful narrative of their patient, persevering labour, their zeal in seeking all valuable knowledge, and their praiseworthy desire of excellence, may excite and direct others. Such narratives, too, make even strangers feel something of the same interest, to which we have just alluded, as belonging to those, who are bound to the deceased by some peculiar tie. It is one of the principal uses of biography, that, by exhibiting the common occupations, thoughts, feelings, designs, attachments, and aversions of the subject of it, it infuses the feelings of private and personal friendship into every reader. Hence the aid, which this sort of writing derives from familiar letters, coming warm from the heart, and artlessly disclosing the inmost workings of the soul and

the affections. We are often most pleased to gather the incidents of a life from such letters. The hero tells his own story. We seem to live and converse with him, and thus acquire that familiar acquaintance, which makes every fact important, that has any influence on his happiness. The letters contained in this volume, though comprising a short period, not much enlivened by adventures, can hardly fail to give a lively and pleasing impression of the writer's mind. Some of them are the letters of a very young man, but of one remarkable for maturity of understanding, and placed in circumstances, which command our sympathy. We witness the gradual progress of his reason ; we see it expanding and acquiring strength. We see him suffering poverty and privation, and disease, yet still applying himself to study, with unbending resolution. We see him surrounded by the most discouraging difficulties, yet still maintaining, for the most part, an unbroken cheerfulness. 'At one time,' he says in a letter to a friend, 'I look forward to the termination of my literary course with pleasant and hopeful expectation ; at another, a thousand difficulties intrude and oppose my passage to the "temple of science." Hope and perseverance, however, still keep uppermost ; and, strengthened and encouraged by the exercise of these principles, I may struggle through the rough road of poverty and trial, and finally obtain my destined object.' (p. 89.)

In a subsequent letter, written soon after attaining the age of twenty-one, he complains of the difficulty of shaking off boyish habits ; but as a proof that he had his serious moments, he adds an ode to Contemplation, from which we select the following lines :

'Shew me the green, delightful bower,
Where friendship passed the happy hour,
While pure, its little realm ;
Show me the hills, the trees, and fields,
The plants and flowers the garden yields,
And venerable elm.

'Nor here abate thy fancied course,
But inward fly with filial force,
And search the lov'd domain ;
O'er every inmate gently bend,
And say of each, "here lives a friend,
And such will e'er remain !"

‘ O happy thought ! O heavenly power !
 That thus can charm the lonely hour,
 And soothe my pensive breast !
 Be thou, Imagination, near,
 For absent joys, do thou appear,
 And lull my cares to rest !’ pp. 92, 93.

There are several poetical pieces in this volume, some of a light and others of a graver cast. They discover, in general, a good taste and a facility of expression. Most of them were written before he went to Cambridge. Had he lived, it is probable he would before long have ceased to cultivate this talent ; for it is evident, that he was not destined to acquire fame as a poet. We shall insert but one further specimen of his poetry. It is an ode to Reflection, written at Providence, May 1817.

‘ The sun in the west is slowly descending,
 And day’s lucid visions recede from our view,
 While night’s sable curtain is gently extending
 To envelop the world in darkness anew.

How sweet is it then to indulge recollection,
 To prove the kind bondage of memory’s chain ;
 The present forego, and in fond retrospection
 Live over the scenes of our childhood again.

The sun of our life, how bright at its rising !
 Unobscured by a cloud it darted its ray !
 And in lustre, to youth’s ardent hope most enticing,
 Portended a brilliant and peace-ruling day !

How sweet was our friendship, how pure were our pleasures,
 How fond our attachments in youth’s glowing age !
 Untaught to succumb to adversity’s pressures,
 Or feel the keen blastings of envy and rage.

How Fancy’s bland visions conspired to invite us,
 And joy in prospective perennial held !
 But alas ! her illusions soon ceased to delight us,
 And dark disappointment her radiance veiled.

Now tossed on the billows of life’s troubled ocean,
 While hope faintly beams on each sorrow-fraught wave,
 We wait for that rest to succeed the commotion,
 Which heaven preludes in the sleep of the grave !’

pp. 186, 187.

We would not be thought to offer this work as possessing any important claims to the attention of the literary world. It is modest and unpretending, and taken for what it professes to be, the history of a youth of amiable and excellent character, of extraordinary powers of mind, and animated by an irrepressible zeal for knowledge and usefulness, we trust it will not be found barren of amusement or profit. We may sum up the history of Person in his own words—‘ a poor mechanic, wholly destitute of pecuniary means to assist himself, without parents or friends to aid him, unfavoured by any efficient patronage, and going too among strangers, sought an education ; succeeded ; has actually passed its first stage, and is commencing its second, in the first literary institution in the country ! Never let one despair of success in a similar enterprise hereafter !’